

## THE PORTAGE IN THE TRADING ECONOMY DURING THE FRENCH COLONIZATION IN THE CONGO: 1875-1914

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### ABSTRACT

Long practiced in traditional societies of Congo, porting was a system that was to carry loads and goods on heads or backs of men. The native who do not have other means of transport, used in everyday. The loads transported depended on the will of the natives themselves. Traditional societies being archaic, the natives themselves were the main players of this Ethnographic society. And the local economy was based on trade in goods trade deals. But at the beginning of French colonization, especially in the arrival of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza in 1875 in Central Africa, porting soon experienced a considerable extent the consequences very points. Before finding a workaround to this problem the indigenes paid a heavy price. This article therefore tries to show the devastating effects of portages during the French colonization in the Congo, in this case the Middle Congo.

**Keywords:** Portage, trading economy, French colonization, Congo.

### INTRODUCTION

From the nineteenth century, the beginning of French colonization in the Congo, African societies in general and especially Congolese were disorganized and weakened. They were victims of the slave trade which caused adverse consequences. Assorted coercive methods, the colonial administration dominated the natives. By using his strength, using repressive methods, porting would cause damage and human bleeding to disastrous consequences. The main issues that will be studied in this article are: How was Congo at the beginning of French colonization what is the impact of porting in the trade economy? Throughout this work, we will make many assumptions by examining first the Congolese companies before the arrival of De Brazza, then the impact of the port in this ethnographic society. Here will be discussed to show the impact of porting, when we know that the portage causes havoc, desertions population's tracks caravans and many diseases.

### Nature Design and porting before the nineteenth century

Weakened by several events (quarrels between kingdoms, the slave trade ...), Congolese companies were disorganized. The port was a cargo port system used daily by these companies, it certainly could draw its roots from the foundation of kingdoms and chiefdoms (Kongo, Teke, Loango, Mbochi ...) .Partout in ethnographic transportation companies (air, rail, truck ..), the main means of freight port was porting. The natives traveled long distances to barter and exchange their products (cassava, fish, rubber, peanuts ..) with their neighbors. However, the arrival of De Brazza in Central Africa in 1875 until the beginning of the First World War (1914), porting faced dramatic development that was accompanied by abuses.

The port can be defined as the port charges and freight weighing 30kg or more a head or backs of men. It is also the land transportation of boats and its contents when navigation is impossible (Garnier et al, 2007). Instrument used for porting was constructed a 'Mutete' with palm branches or bananas, and this is still being practiced today. This native method was used for any activity requiring daily transportation. It was the most convenient way for carrying loads and goods.

### Ports tracks

The road that connects the Atlantic coast N'couna was the Ogooué Franceville up and Alima. It existed before the discovery of portage trails.

However, in 1882, Brazza discovered the trail of slaves and portages, and also recognizes the Dolisie in 1883. This track was originally used to transport ivory and slaves to the coast (Kibiti Niongui Mpassi, 2005). It connected the coast to the kingdom of Mbe and N'couna which in 1883 became Brazzaville. It was about 525Km long. The road to Loango Brazzaville wrote Dolisie consisted of three sections:

Loango to Loudima;

Loudima made to the separation of the waters;

Niari and Djoué and Djoue in Brazzaville (Coquery Vidrovitch, 1969).

Another avenue left from Loango to Loudima and Philippeville, and Philippeville to Manyanga and Manyanga Brazzaville.

Indeed, on this track, salt was a rare commodity and occupied a prominent place in trade deals. It was in the form of *Mutete*, loads all the stories of the nineteenth centuries are as true currency of the interior (Mbokolo, 1972). The trade deals were to exchange low-value European products such as pearls, cowries with local products (rubber, ivory, copper ...).

In 1882, Brazza was looking for a route that would link to the rating pool. It Stanley as he studied this track and Kamba was attacked in a village where the people had never seen unworthy white (Kibiti Niongui Mpassi, 2005). The track portages and slaves constituted a danger to the people who had sought installed. European recruiting sometimes brutally, were burning their villages and looting their plantations. This track was regularly used for almost all convoys to the French Congo until 1898.

However, in 1884, with the revolts of the people against the colonial administration, the portage trail was dangerous. People were often captured. To reduce the danger that was ruining the trade, it sealed the game of alliances between groups (Mbokolo, 1972). In fact, the people who settled along these tracks were harmful to the holders and white. She refused in case of rain and help them sell their food (Michel, 1972).

In Loango and in some villages of the Mayombe, the relationships between promoters and natives deteriorated due to excessive recruitment of porters. Several political and administrative posts were created to control populations and porting as is the case Loudima (1883).

Without denying its economic and social importance, track caravans and portages were also the main corridor spreading sicknesses. The Manyanga trail started from Comba to Manyanga and existed since the period of the slave trade. But with the abolition of slavery, it had the role to evacuate rubber, copper Boko-Songho and ivory to the Belgian Congo (Idem). In addition these tracks, there were others including Bembe, Teke.

## The Berlin Conference (1884-1885)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Berlin was an important center of decisions. From 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885 occurred the Berlin conference. To a considerable extent, this conference tried to settle territorial disputes between the great powers by separate agreements (Kinata, 2005). It ended with the drafting of the General Act of Berlin.

Among the conclusions was the free trade for all nations. Imported goods were freed from entry and exit fees unless the collection of taxes (Ibid). All the territories constituting the Congo Basin and its tributaries and the basins of the Niari, Ogooué, Nile and Niger were subject to free movement. Brazza left this conference victorious. As he asserted in a letter written to CHAVANES: " *If in Berlin, strangled we presented, we have become choke, thanks to N'couna and also thanks to you that we could repair errors from the coast and Quillou ..*" (Coquery Vidrovitch, 1969).

Clearly, the Berlin conference had to an extent increased the activity of the port, with the free navigation of almost all major rivers. The boundaries of the zones of influence were established definitively.

## Porting Actors

Initially, the unworthy were themselves key players in the portage. In an archaic society without the development of science and technology that could favor the emergence of transportation, indigenous people used the port to transport goods.

However, during the colonial penetration, other actors were born. These are business houses, the colonial administration, the concessionary companies that had shared the French Congo in 1898, and Christian missions installed on the Atlantic coast who recruited the porters regularly. In 1876, one could count on the European's 146 factories of the coast which were divided as follows: 78 between Loango and the mouth of the Congo, 33 even in the estuary of the river and 35 between the river and the port of Ambriz ( Mbokolo, 1972). More six factories belonging to 06 countries (Vennetier, 1968). The Dutch dominated the home market. The Spanish factories were encountered in Pointe-Noire and the Belgian Congo. Dumas The house was also installed along the coast. These trading houses, only they recruited the porters. The Dutch house, for example manufactured canoes to transport his goods (Idem).

Because of the increased competition, Dumas left home to Pointe Noire and Loango away some traffic in ivory (Ibid). The factories installed in the Mayombe and Kakamoueka also used holders. Caravans coming from the valley of Niari came there regularly. They did eight days walk bringing rubber and palm kernels.

Clearly, the business houses had developed significant traffic along the coasts. Holders brought regular benefits to these different business houses.

In 1898, the Congo was shared by several concessionary companies. Its economic development required considerable demographic sacrifices. Also, the French Company du Haut Bas-Congo (CFHBC), the Company Owners Kouilou Niari (CPKN) divided the French Congo.

The CFHBC with Trechot brothers used the carriers. The main evacuation routes were the waters, canoes were reserved to specialists who undertook to transport the goods. The CPKN also solicited holders to pay them various benefits. These various concessionary companies sometimes took hostage of women and children from men consulted so that they do not escape. If the amount of ivory or rubber required was not paid, the hostages were still in captivity (Acts of the International Symposium, 2006) .The repeat offenders were simply eliminated. Dealer companies sometimes applied coercive measures to recruit porters. Recalcitrant populations were simply put down or shot. Many skirmishes broke out in the villages. The colony had to suffice itself for its economic enhancement. The use of porters was undeniable.

From the above, the question of the port cargo and heavy loads was resolved by resorting to Holders. The port was regulated by the issue of a booklet (Idem).

Regarding the colonial administration, the most striking case is that of the merchant Mission called from Congo-Nile mission. This mission mobilized 45 million people died around 9000 and led (Vennetier, 1968) .The abuse by portages were dramatic. Settlement reached its cruising speed as abuses were observed everywhere (Idem). The memory of porting companies and dealers would undoubtedly be in the collective memory of Congolese.

Christian missions installed since 1883 Loango has solicited the services of porters to carry their loads. In 1886 for example, a Catholic mission Linzolo mobilized several carriers for the transport of loads (Coquery Vidrovitch, 1968) .This is the leaders of villages and lineages that facilitated the recruitment of portage, and it is them also who also kept control of operations. In summary, the use of porters by the various aforementioned actors provoked considerable demographic consequences, since the natives were abused.

### **The magnitude of porting**

In the second half of the nineteenth centuries, Belgians and French embarked on a frantic in the Congo Basin. Stanley passage in the Niari Valley founded several positions including Loudima in 1883.

On the side of France, the years 1883-1885 marked the West African mission to discover what is known today as the French Congo. The colonial administration solicited for this the many wearers services. Here, the carrier took considerable magnitude.

From 1887, writing in the Colonial Office, DE BRAZZA said: " *There are five months we have opened a live road loango Brazzaville and Bouenza .This loango are accomplishing the service of our transport (Vennetier 1968) .*

In light of all the foregoing, the loango were people who paid the heaviest price due to their proximity to the Atlantic coast.

From loango to Loudima, it's the little caravans of 20 to 30 persons who provided the service. Their recruitment was easy.300 porters could carry 90 tons of cargo. The populations were endangered. Hence the use of Cougni populations. Indeed, after loango Cougni appeared to play a critical role during this period. The state of recapitulation of caravans recruited from 1<sup>st</sup> August to 20 December 1896 brings up 50 recruited campers, caravans Cougni 37 against 17 and 4 Kamba Vili (Michel, 1972).

In 1890, dissatisfied harassment whose holders were victim Jules Berton (Mouyabi, 2002) noted with bitterness the desertion of populations along the caravan trails particularly to Loudima. Porting reached a cruising speed. The populations living along the tracks deserted their villages. This phenomenon had resulted in the mixing of populations and accentuated the spread of many diseases.

In 1896, Warrant Officer PRATT could say the same thing as his predecessor Jules Berton who had traveled one of the tracks of the caravans. On leaving the Mayombe, he noted the desertion of populations along the tracks. As he claimed; " Leaving the Mayombe, one arrives in the plain; the whole country with more than 150 km is flat. They are all set in the interior, so that the passing caravans no longer plunder their plantations (Idem).

In carrying system and trading products, Bembe were the most resistant and recalcitrant. With they created many skirmishes. While Teke were docile and honest people. During the mission of West Africa (1883-1885), they made many has served DEBrazza and his team (Coquery Vidrovitch) .Each Teke touched four fathoms Indian, a glass powder, a little ice, cowries and especially three glasses of salt (Id) .All holders were paid in kind.

In 1909, Emil Gentil wrote *'The salary was paid in beads and fabrics, when he was not, into alcohol and powder processing ...'* (Vennetier, 1968). The payment of the holders into alcohol has been the Loango origin of exhaustion and death of valid workers. In 1881.3100 holders were recruited from Loango with loads and goods. But the track was very bad. Veistroffer for his part believed that the road to Loango was very difficult. Also he claimed *'... Finally, we arrive at a large plain: the Kouilou- Niari Valley, land of men in my caravan must hear their cries!'* (Ibid).

When the porters had to pay in cash, the transport cost was estimated around 200 to 250francs a tone.

Considering the damage caused by alcohol regarding contamination loango, with the development of tuberculosis and other diseases, the introduction of wage labor was inevitable. Indeed, a 30kg load could be paid to 65f is 2,16f per kilogram.

In short, at the end of the nineteenth century, the port had reached its climax. The colonial administration accomplished several missions during that period. It was necessary to mobilize men to finally conquer the military territory of Chad whose resistance was fierce, showcase the French Congo and permanently occupy the Kouilou-Niari. Roads, vehicles and means of transport did not exist, so the holders were recruited massively.

### **The Marchand Mission**

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Congo Nile Mission became the merchant mission and it was one of the great expeditions of French black Africa. This mission was designed to carry 90 tons of cargo towards the Nile.

One of the architects of this expedition was definitely Brazza. He claimed *'the occupation of Upper Nile could give us a situation (...) allow us to enter into negotiations with England on reciprocal concessions in the settlement of the Egyptian question'* (Michel, 1972). Brazza's idea about browse the coast to the Nile was not approved by France, as England had already occupies this territory. In 1891 Brazza had developed the idea of taking a privileged position

at Fashoda, former Egyptian station founded in 1885 and later abandoned during the Mahdist conquest. The idea of the merchant from Baratier Mission dated back to October 1895 (Kibiti Niongui Mpassi, 2005). But it is ultimately Marchand who made this project a reality. It was thus the organizer. He received approval from the French government after a long delay, six months before his shipping for Africa 25 June 1896.

Thus, several men of the French army were mobilized outside Marchand himself. Such as Baratier Germain and captains, lieutenants Mangin, Largeau and Simon. The distance was about 6000km is enormous to say the coast has Fashoda. On the part of the holders, 45,000 men were recruited (Michel, 1972). But the consequences were dramatic as the side that carriers of the colonial administration. However, holders paid the heaviest price with about 9000 deaths. The compensation of the men of the mission were paid on arrival in France (Idem).

The purpose of this mission was to quickly reach Fashoda to have a strategic position in this country which is at the crossroads of three continents (Africa, Asia and Europe). The Mission merchant is also due to economic reasons, because the Nile Valley had invaluable wealth. We must not forget that this was happening in full colonial period. But England had already occupied this strategic region. It was impossible to evacuate the benefit of France. British resistance therefore was bitter. France was defeated and went out to evacuate the area in favor of England.

The porters were carrying huge loads, there were no bridges over rivers which were numerous. It has passed the ford or swimming (Landeroin, 1996). Yes the high waters, the holders until they stopped falling. Sometimes they abandoned their charges (Idem). The merchant Mission begat many consequences.

### **The consequences of the Merchant mission and porting**

The merchant mission and portage reached their climax in the nineteenth century which led to considerable demographic consequences.

Regarding the Merchant mission, members of the mission led to terrible repression against the population. The activity of the Marchand mission was amplified as there was desertion of the people who were already terrorized by porting. On recruited 45,000 men, about 9,000 lost their lives. Populations Sundi, Hangala ... emigrated in Teke country that was a favorite environment for migrants. This repressive activity occasioned the mixing of populations. The activity of the port during the mission if repressive murderous merchant was subject to brutal and inhumane methods. The members of the mission had described with great reserve (Mouyabi, 2002). Only, immigration north and south of the port of tracks had taken a considerable extent. It was also the disruption of socio-economic and political structures caused by the instability of populations. Everywhere in the villages, famine settled and disease developed.

As for the port in 1898 in the valley of Niari, had begun a dangerous epidemic of sleeping sickness triggered by the repeated passage of carriers loango (Coquery Vidrovitch, 1972). This disease could have done more than 35000 victims (Idem).

In 1900, the colonial administration had regulated porting. Business houses had to pay to the administration of the region roadmap of their convoys, with registered status and conditions

of appointment of caravan leader (ibid) .The port had therefore lead when he reached the dead especially its climax. People fled their villages to escape the recruitment and repression. In Congo, no medium does seem to be exempt from the portage. In lowland areas, diseases (trypanosomiasis, sleeping ...) decimated more than half of the population. Added to this is alcoholism, which also led to terrible deaths.

In northern Congo, trypanosomiasis and sleeping attacked the Oubangui and other populations. 94 people died of sleeping sickness. Examined in 8661 and 1913.300 diseases were identified (Coquery Vidrovitch 1972).

Clearly, human portage causes adverse effects. The populations were terrorized victims requisitions, summary executions with shots and whips. These methods employed against carriers had unfortunate impacts and contributed to the settlement in Congo.

## CONCLUSION

The port during the colonial period (1875-1914) brought about remarkable effects. The demographic consequences were considerable. People were fleeing villages and repression to avoid being recruited. Diseases such as trypanosomiasis, sleep ... were born. The trays were Bateke for this a place of refuge populations who emigrated to escape the control of the colonial administration. This different migration in turn led to famines and intermixing of populations. Fields, crops and livestock were abandoned.

The colonial work as being that of preserving the human species, the administration found solutions to address this problem which had a permanently depopulated Congo. Because of the slow traffic and abuse of porting the solution was the construction of the railway that had to be created without delay. As stated in these terms Chavannes "*The 500km is a straight line between Brazzaville loango offered the possibility of a land that had to be created without delay*" (Coquery Vidrovitch, 1969) .In 1898, the Con Belgian, the construction of the railway Matadi-Leopoldville brought a workaround for the problem of porting. However, in the French Congo, 1921 marks the date of commencement of work very Congo Ocean Railway (CFCO) .Although with a long delay, De Brazza's ideas were materialized and the opening of the Iron Road led to the abandonment of the portage trails and caravans.

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